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SUBJECT: Niger: Ambassador and Foreign Minister Meeting

Ref: a) Niamey 661 and State 93894
b) Niamey 660 and State 95073
c) Niamey 659 and State 94939

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 14, Ambassador Allen, accompanied by Political Officer (notetaker) met with Government of Niger (GON) Foreign Minister (FM) Mindaoudou, in the presence of the GON Director of the Americas, Asia and Oceania (notetaker), to deliver three demarches related to: the United Nations Food Security Summit (ref a), Iranian nuclear program (ref b) and Kosovo independence (ref c). Ambassador also used the occasion to reiterate USG concerns about the ongoing political situation in Niger and, as a consequence, the ongoing review of USG-GON bilateral engagements. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador opened the meeting with the demarches (refs a through c). The FM indicated the GON would send a representative to the Food Security Summit in New York and noted that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had invited the African nations to Caracas to attend an African-Latin American Cooperation Summit that falls during the same time period as the UN Food Security Summit. On Iran's nuclear program FM Mindaoudou responded that the GON only supports nuclear technology for "peaceful means and civil defense." She insisted that this has always been the GON's stance on Iran's nuclear program, and that the GON will continue to affirm this position. On Kosovo independence, the FM instructed the Director for the Americas, Asia and Oceania to note the possibility that the GON may be approached for a meeting, but she did not commit the GON to any specific actions.

¶3. (U) After concluding with the demarche matters, Ambassador conveyed USG concern and disappointment about the turn of political events in Niger, stifling ten years of democratic progress. She added that for nine years the Republic of Niger had been lauded as a model democracy on the African continent, but that image has been tarnished by the recent dissolution or tampering with institutions (e.g. the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court), changes to the composition of the High Council for Communication (CSC) with adverse effect on press freedom, arrests of persons in opposition to the constitutional referendum and imposition of a travel ban on former parliamentarians, all actions more characteristic of an autocracy than a democracy. Mindaoudou was resolute in her support for President Tandja, stated she understands the USG position, but insisted that "the GON will continue to serve the people." She remarked that a number of partners had expressed their views on the Nigerien political situation, had discussed with the GON possible sanctions, and that the GON will have to adjust to its changed relationships accordingly. In short, the Ambassador and FM agreed to disagree about the current state of Niger's political environment.

¶4. (U) Ambassador Allen expressed disappointment that candidates for the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) missed or may not be able to attend their respective programs because of recent arrests and the GON travel ban for some persons. She cited as an example a woman parliamentarian who missed the opportunity to participate in an IVLP because of the travel ban imposed on some former parliamentarians, and suggested that the FM, as a former IVLP participant, perhaps could appreciate the benefit of the IVLP, especially for women leaders. FM acknowledged the benefits of the program, but made no comments regarding persons who have missed or will miss opportunities this cycle.

¶5. (SBU) At the close of the meeting the FM, prompted by the Americas Director, lodged a complaint about the trafficking in persons (TIP) report, notably the information regarding prostitution in Niger. The FM alleged that the report reads as if prostitution is rampant in Niger. Ambassador responded that she didn't recall such a strong characterization of prostitution in the TIP report, but stressed that Niger is not immune to prostitution, especially in mining areas. Ambassador added that the Embassy had reported GON efforts to address TIP issues, but that those efforts were deemed marginal by the relevant Department of State office, especially since the GON has yet to pass and implement anti-TIP legislation. (Note: The GON has not passed an anti-TIP law, though the Embassy has raised the matter with the GON dating back to 2005 and a draft law was prepared in 2006. End note.)

Allen